Use of toxic chemicals in food and vegetables

†*90.SHRI LALIT KISHORE CHATURVEDI: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether toxic chemicals are being used in fresh foodstuff and sweets;

(b) whether Formaldehyde, Boric and Benzoic acids, industrial colour sulphur dioxide etc. are being used fearlessly in order to keep vegetables fresh in look and colour;

(c) whether use of these chemicals is increasing liver, kidney and cancer-related diseases along with mental retardation and hinders the physical and mental growth of children;

(d) whether gas is used for making wine, and also for ripening and drying of fruits, which is increasing respiratory and heart related diseases; and

(e) if so, the measures being, taken to stop this practice at processing and marketing levels?

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (DR. ANBUMANI RAMDOSS): (a) and (b) No, Sir. The salts of benzoie acid and sulphur dioxide are permitted to be used for selected food for specific purposes under PFA Rules, 1955. The permitted levels have been fixed after due consideration of safety. The use of industrial colours in vegetables is not permitted.

(c) Maximum limits for use of various chemicals have been prescribed in the PFA Act and Rules. Within the prescribed limit, such use is considered to be safe for human beings.

(d) The PFA Rules, 1955, prohibits use of carbide gas for ripening of fruits. The State Governments have been requested to keep vigil on quality of fruits for ensuring that they are not ripened artificially by use of carbide gas. The use of sulphur dioxide is permitted in alcoholic wines, dehydrated fruits and dehydrated vegetables upto a prescribed level and permitted levels have been fixed after due consideration of safety. According to ICMR, sulphites beyond permissible level are known to trigger asthma in sensitive individuals, while there is no information on causing heart related problems.

(e) The Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, and Rules, 1955 have been enacted to prevent adulteration in food stuffs. Food articles sold in the market are required to conform to the specifications laid down under PFA Rules, 1955. The implementation of Act and Rules is entrusted with the Food (Health) Authorities of the States/U.Ts. Random samples of various food articles are taken by enforcement staff of the State Governments and penal action is taken against the offenders where the samples do not conform to the prescribed standards.

The State Governments have been requested from time to time to check the malpractice of using artificial colours, harmful chemicals, non-edible oils etc. on vegetables and fruits and also create awareness among the vendors about ill effects of such practices. Recently, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, an autonomous statutory body under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, has been set up by the Government to look into all the matters related to Food Safety.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi